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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

B40
Research Memorandum
RSE-29, March 1, 1968

TO : The Secretary

THROUGH: S/S

FROM : IMR - Roger Hilsman

SUBJECT: Total Soviet Silence on Withdrawal of Troops from Cuba Continues

Moscow has still not reported Khrushchev's promise to withdraw thousands of Soviet troops from Cuba. Soviet media did not include any references to withdrawal of Soviet troops in reporting the President's February 19 press conference at which the promise was discussed following its publication by the White House earlier that day. Since then Moscow propaganda and the Soviet leadership have remained totally silent on the subject.

Contrast to Earlier Withdrawals

Moscow propaganda's failure to say anything at all about the troop withdrawal -- not even by way of a news report -- is in marked contrast to prompt Soviet reportage of the decisions on the removal of the missiles and the IL-28's.

The text of Khrushchev's October 28 letter to the President announcing the decision to dismantle the missile bases was published the same day; the wire services even scooped diplomatic channels in delivering the message. While the Soviet media did not report Khrushchev's remark at the November 7 Kremlin reception that the missiles had been withdrawn, subsequent Moscow propaganda used the fact of the missile withdrawal, and US acknowledgement of it as part of the rationale for demanding reciprocity on the part of the US in terms of non-invasion assurances to Cuba and in describing the Soviet gesture as a means of promoting peaceful coexistence.

On November 20 TASS reported the Castro letter to U Thant of November 19 announcing his willingness to part with the IL-28's (earlier Soviet and Cuban propaganda had identified them as Cuban property) so that they might be withdrawn. TASS also reported the reference to the removal of the IL-28s in covering the President's press November 20 conference, and later cited US statements to show that the Soviet promise was in fact being carried out.

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Reasons for the Soviet Silence

For the present we can only speculate about the motives for current Soviet reticence about troop withdrawals, and we cannot predict when or if Moscow will break the curious silence.

Concern over Domestic Reaction

One possible reason for Moscow's silence may be reluctance to tell the domestic audience -- which is always skittish about military danger -- of the large number of Soviet troops stationed so far from home. Soviet media have not told the Soviet people of the number of Soviet troops in Cuba, and have generally used ambiguous words like "personnel" or "technicians" to play down the nature of the Soviet military presence. Though Khrushchev on October 28 referred to Soviet "officers" as being in command of the missiles, subsequent propaganda has indicated that missile-associated personnel were withdrawn; TASS did not report the safer return to the troop-withdrawal question in the President's November 20 press conference and Secretary Rusk's December 10 press conference.

Foreign Policy Considerations

Unlike the October - November period when Moscow was playing the theme of compromise and mutual concessions in order to defuse the crisis and engage the US in negotiations on other issues, Moscow is now beginning to take a firmer line in dealings with the West. The Soviets today appear to regard public discussion of another concession to the US as embarrassing, and they may have wanted to wait until after the Malinovsky speech of February 23 and Khrushchev's February 27 speech had re-established at least part of the image of Soviet military strength before surfacing their latest concession on Cuba.

The Soviet Union probably also feels that it is open to trenchant Chinese Communist criticism -- Peiping's report of the February 19 White House announcement and the President's press conference of that day played up the troop withdrawal concession in a manner calculated to suggest that Khrushchev was a fool for making it without getting anything in return. At a moment when intra-bloc relations are especially tense and when the USSR is seeking to at least give the appearance of avoiding an exacerbation of polemics with China, the Soviets might well choose to avoid publicizing a subject upon which they would have to debate from a vulnerable position.

Finally, we cannot exclude the possibility -- though on balance we believe it to be unlikely -- that Moscow has had second thoughts or disagreements among the leadership about going through with the promised withdrawal. Upon further reflection the Soviets may have decided not to pull out the troops or to slow down the withdrawal -- conceivably in

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in response to Cuban demands. Or, Moscow may believe that it can command a price for withdrawal -- perhaps in the matter of diminishing or eliminating US overflights of Cuba and surveillance of Soviet shipping bound for Cuba.

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